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## THE INQUIRER Today MAGAZINE

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*Every time I looked up and smiled, it drove her to a new strength of labor.*

"**M**Y WIFE has a new hobby," I said. "She makes driftwood out of old lamps."

"George used to be a birdwatcher," Mabel Wilson said. "But the excitement was too much for him. Now

for the next 20 minutes while she read the paper."

My wife laughed lightly. "It was a ridiculous article about how women are inefficient because they always



*Every time I looked up and smiled, it drove her to a new strength of labor.*

Inquirer  
FICTION

# DOUBLE EXPOSURE

*Jim and George skip a day's work  
to check up on their dawdling wives*

By Jack Ritchie

ILLUSTRATED BY PHILIP WISHNEFSKY

"**M**Y WIFE has a new hobby," I said. "She makes driftwood out of old lamps."

"George used to be a birdwatcher," Mabel Wilson said. "But the excitement was too much for him. Now when he has any free time he just sits in an easy chair and thinks positive."

George Wilson unwrapped a cigar. "It's all these electrical gadgets. This push-button world gives women so much leisure that they got time to think. They crack up by the thousands."

My wife, Lisa, stopped admiring her lamp. "We women still work from dawn to dusk. I'm sure I read that somewhere."

George lit his cigar. "My mother used to get up at the crack of dawn, haul water from the well, chop a cord or two of wood, and then light the fire. All this before she finally got around to making breakfast."

"Your mother lived in an apartment all her life, dear," Mabel said.

"Well," George said thoughtfully. "I guess I'm thinking of my grandmother. Anyway I always felt sorry for her. I bought her a power saw on her 60th birthday."

I decided to live dangerously. "Women just think they're putting in full time. They spend three-quarters of their time dawdling. Just the other evening Lisa went into the kitchen to make a pot of coffee. She put a newspaper for the coffee grounds on the kitchen table and then stood there poised with the grounds in one hand

for the next 20 minutes while she read the paper."

My wife laughed lightly. "It was a ridiculous article about how women are inefficient because they always forget what they're doing."

George glanced at his watch. "I guess we'd better go home, Mabel. I've got a hard day at the office tomorrow. It's my turn to get the coffee."

He got to his feet. "Jim, if we could just check on what our wives do with their time when we're away slaving, I'll bet it would be a real eye-opener."

In the morning when I came down for breakfast, I stared moodily at the toaster. "I don't feel so well today. I think I'll stay home."

There was worry in Lisa's eyes. "I think I'll call Dr. Beacon."

I waved a hand. "There's no need for that when there are so many other wounded worse than I." I smiled reassuringly. "I just feel sort of middling uneasy. I'm more or less too sick to stand up and too well to lie down. I'll just sit here and watch you."

The phone rang and Lisa left the table to answer it. "Yes, Mabel," she said after a moment. "Jim, too."

Her eyes became thoughtful as she listened further. "I see," she said slowly, her voice heavy with significance. "George is just sitting there and watching? So is Jim."

It was another minute before Lisa put down the phone. She surveyed me, her face almost expressionless. "George is middling uneasy, too."



I buttered my toast. "Now that's a coincidence. We probably picked up the same bug."

"No doubt," my wife said dryly. "I imagine it was last night."

Breakfast was a silent affair and

Relief flickered in her eyes for a second and then disappeared. "I won't be able to make it." She sighed dramatically. "There's still so much to do around here."

"Oh?" I asked pleasantly. "Like

plastic playing cards with a moist rag, Lisa?" I asked helpfully. "They look a little smudgy."

Their eyes were uniformly piercing. "One minute has gone by," I said. And then I sneezed.

I sniffed a bit. "I know. Here I've been feverish all day and not one drop of sympathy. I'm flirting with the idea of delirium."

"I'm sorry," Lisa said contritely. "I extend one retrospective *Geocumulus*."



PH

I buttered my toast. "Now that's a coincidence. We probably picked up the same bug."

"No doubt," my wife said dryly. "I imagine it was last night."

Breakfast was a silent affair and when I finished, I pushed back my chair. "Let's play a game of scrabble or something."

My wife glared. "I'm no dabbler. I've got the dishes to do and then house-work."

The dishes clattered as she gathered them together and carried them to the sink. She began work with determined fury, darting a sharp glance in my direction now and then.

When the last dish was stacked away, she paused only long enough for a deep breath and began dusting. I lounged in the living room reading a magazine. Every time I looked up and smiled, it drove her to a new strength of labor.

By 11 she was staggering, but she set her chin and launched into the preparation of an elaborate lunch.

She picked at her food listlessly.

"You look tired, dear," I said. "Why don't you rest a while? Or whop together another lamp?"

"Tired?" Her voice broke into a high laugh. "Of course not. This is just a typical day."

I sipped my coffee and looked out of the window. "At least you should be able to take it easy a little later in the afternoon. Your Canasta Club meets at Mrs. Claridge's home, doesn't it?"

Relief flickered in her eyes for a second and then disappeared. "I won't be able to make it." She sighed dramatically. "There's still so much to do around here."

"Oh?" I asked pleasantly. "Like what?"

"Don't push me," she snapped. "I'll think of something."

The doorbell rang and I went to answer it.

Mabel Wilson eyed me narrowly. "I just dropped over to see Lisa for a moment. Five minutes, to be exact." She was both defiant and defensive. "George gave me permission."

"Of course you ought to have five minutes to call your own," Lisa said. "Men have coffee breaks at the office. Even in the Army, the soldiers get ten minutes off every hour."

I nodded. "I see your point. I'll keep time." I consulted my watch. "Fifteen seconds have gone by."

Mabel glared and then turned to Lisa. "Does he follow your every move with his beady . . . ?"

"Yes," my wife said emphatically. "Like a hawk."

"I deny that," I said indignantly. "Thirty seconds."

Mabel glanced about the room. "My place looks sparkling, too. I'm running out of things to . . ." She stopped.

"The laundry," my wife said brightly. Then her face clouded. "I did mine yesterday. Also the ironing."

Mabel nodded. "But there must be something."

"How about wiping our genuine

plastic playing cards with a moist rag, Lisa?" I asked helpfully. "They look a little smudgy."

Their eyes were uniformly piercing.

"One minute has gone by," I said. And then I sneezed.

Lisa's eyes widened. "Did you hear that? He sneezed."

"Well, don't just stand there," I said peevishly. "Somebody say *Gesundheit*."

Lisa put her hand on my forehead. "He's got a slight fever." She met Mabel's eyes. "You don't suppose that they're really sick?"

Mabel pondered a moment. Then she walked to our phone and dialed. "Hello, George. No, it's nothing special. Just keep breathing into the mouthpiece for a little while."

She stood there a full minute, listening, and then smiled. "Gesundheit, George. I'll be right home, dear. Don't stand in any drafts."

"You've still got another two minutes," I said.

She smiled indulgently. "Men are such dears."

Lisa got Dr. Beacon to come over at 4 o'clock.

After the examination, he put his thermometer away. "It's nothing at all serious. Just a slight cold. He ought to be all right in a day or two. As a matter of fact, he could go back to work tomorrow if he takes these pills I'm going to prescribe."

When he was gone, my wife patted me on the head. "I've misjudged you, dear."

I sniffed a bit. "I know. Here I've been feverish all day and not one drop of sympathy. I'm flirting with the idea of delirium."

"I'm sorry," Lisa said contritely. "I extend one retroactive *Gesundheit*."

She sat down in an easy chair and her eyes traveled around the room. "My, but the house looks clean."

"Yes," I said, avoiding her eyes. "Except for those smudgy playing cards."

Lisa got a damp rag.

The next morning at the office, George and I met at the water cooler.

He grinned. "Did you have the same devilish idea I had yesterday?"

I nodded. "I think we got saved by the bug."

His grin dwindled to a sickly smile as he looked over my shoulder.

I turned and saw that Lisa and Mabel Wilson were standing behind me. Their smiles were extremely broad.

"Mabel and I decided to take a day off," Lisa said. "We thought it might be so informative if we spent it here in your office."

Mabel's voice was coated with sweetness. "Your boss thought that it was such a jolly idea. As a matter of fact, he insisted that we make out a report at the end of the day."

Lisa met my eyes. "Well, are you going to stand there all day drinking water?"

George and I never put in a harder working day in our lives.

THE END